Rockville *Maryland*

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Mayor and Council

For the meeting on:	June 15, 2009
Department:	City Manager
Division:	City Manager
Responsible staff:	Marylou Berg, Assistant to the City Manager
	phone: (240) 314 - 8105
	mberg@rockvillemd.gov

Subject
Community Branding Project

Recommendation
It is recommended that the Mayor and Council issue a Request for Proposal (RFP) for a communi!
branding research and development project, with a not-to-exceed budget of $75,000. This projec
which was approved as part of the FY2010 Operating Budget, will require engaging a consultant !
undertake the research and development phases of a City branding campaign. The consultant's
work, which will be overseen by the City's Communication Manager, will involve conducting
community research, creating a brand strategy, producing creative elements to include a logo an
tagline, and producing a plan for implementing the brand. The $75,000 budget does not include
actual implementation costs. Implementation of the brand will involve carrying out over time a
marketing strategy, and will likely entail expenditures for signs, stationary, vehicle painting,
publicity materials, special events, and other related purposes.

Discussion
During its biannual retreat of January 12-13, 2008, the Mayor and Council developed its ten-yeai
vision for Rockville, and identified specific priorities to pursue over the subsequent two years. Th
Mayor and Council's adopted vision for the community focuses on the following seven major
themes: Distinct Neighborhoods, One City; A Cultural Destination; Green City; Quality Built
Environment; Exceptional City Services; Economic Development and Sustainability; and
Community Engagement.

One of the Vision Priorities for 2008-10 associated with "Economic Development and Sustainabili!
is to "develop and implement a City branding campaign with the goal of attracting the public to
Rockville." In discussing this subject, the Mayor and Council described a campaign that would
support a long-term vision of the community as a place perceived by residents and visitors to be
regional hub that is distinctively business-friendly, and a regional cultural and entertainment
destination.

To that end, the City will seek the services of a qualified consultant with substantial experience t(
create a community brand and branding strategy that effectively communicates Rockville's

strengths, distinctiveness, and community values in order to promote Rockville as an attractive place to live, visit, work, and conduct business. The City's brand should creatively convey an authentic and consistent message that engenders civic pride, and distinguishes Rockville as the region's economic, cultural, and governmental hub.

What is Community Branding?

Community branding is a tool communities use to define themselves, shape perceptions, and attract positive attention. Successful branding creates a strong and distinctive thematic message that best defines a community's essential assets, and then markets that message. An effective brand strategy creates a positive emotional connection for the intended audience, and differentiates a community from other places in ways that enhance community pride and improve its competitive position. It should be a tool that reinforces a strong community identity for existing residents and businesses, lures visitors seeking shopping, recreational, and cultural opportunities and attracts new employers, businesses, and residents to locate in the community. The attached article from the June 2006 issue *Public Management* provides an excellent overview of community branding (Attachment A).

Branding can be a huge asset for a community to leverage what is "special" or competitive about the community. If executed poorly, a brand can work against a community, or become a political issue.
A successful community brand is produced through a process of developing a long-term vision for place that is relevant and compelling to its key audiences.

A brand and brand strategy are developed based on research and analysis aimed at gaining in-depth understanding of a community's attributes in relation to its competition. This research and analysis entails determining the perceptions of relevant stakeholders, understanding regional demographic, economic, and political trends, and clarifying the City's goals and aspirations.

Rockville's Current Situation

For those of us who daily "live and breathe" Rockville, we already experience our strong community identity, and we are aware of Rockville's many positive assets. Our biannual citizen survey consistently finds a large majority of residents holding strongly favorable attitudes about the community and the City government. Rockville has also drawn the attention of national business publications *Money Magazine*, which has twice in recent years named Rockville as one of the country's "Great Places to Live," and, most recently, *Forbes*, which ranked Rockville eighth on its list of "Top 25 Towns to Live Well." Distilling this experience and awareness, and communicating to a wider audience within and outside of Rockville is what an effective branding project should offer. Long-time residents, newcomers to Rockville, and prospective residents, businesses, and visitors are all primary audiences for a branding effort that captures and promotes what is timeless, dynamic, and distinctive about Rockville.

The City is already involved in some notable branding-related efforts. A few from among many examples are as follows:

1. The City is a finalist in this year's All America City competition.

2. The City-funded Rockville Economic Development, Inc. (REDI), with its tagline "Known for the Companies We Keep," has promoted Rockville throughout the region as "home of the genome," where advanced biotech industry, research companies, and related federal government agencies thrive. REDI's "Why Rockville" campaign is a recent notable marketing effort. REDI, with the assistance of its marketing consultant, is currently developing new mission and vision statements that will serve as the foundation for further brand development.

3. The "Buy Rockville" campaign, began as a joint effort of the City, the Rockville Chamber of

Commerce, and REDI, as a way to support and stimulate Rockville-based retail establishments ar restaurants. Still in its early stages, the Chamber has taken on leadership of the program and is building a "coalition of stakeholders."

4. By recently engaging a consultant to inventory Rockville's existing cultural and entertainment resources, the City is taking the first step toward developing a Cultural and Entertainment Plan, with a strategy for promoting Rockville as a regional cultural and entertainment center.

5. City-sponsored events such as Hometown Holidays, the Memorial Day Parade, Uncorked Wine and Music Festival, and the annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday Celebration, bring Rockville region-wide distinction.

6. The City's five biannual city-wide surveys provide valuable insight into citizens' views and assessments of municipal services and community characteristics. The results and findings of the surveys provide important branding-related information.

7. The City has long devoted considerable resources to supporting its media and public informatic capabilities. During the past year, we have been addressing the organizational fragmentation of (television, website, newsletter, PIO, and graphics operations. All of these operations have been brought into management alignment within the Communication and Public Information Division. Currently, our City communication products are professional, but our materials do not have a unified look and feel. There is little or no common theme and appearance apparent in our public informational and promotional print materials, Website, television channel, vehicle painting, signs programs, and event. A brand should assist further with this effort.

Branding in Other Communities

A community's brand is contained in the variety of people's perceptions, feelings, and attitudes about a community. Every community to some degree already has a "brand," in the sense that every community has an identity based on people's perceptions of that place. Major, iconic American cities such as New York, San Francisco, Chicago, and Washington, D.C. carry strong an distinctive images nationally and internationally. For smaller and less prominent communities competing for business, visitors, and residents on a regional scale, the importance of community branding is becoming increasingly recognized.

McKinney, Texas is similar to Rockville in that it is one of several suburbs near a large, well-know City (Dallas). In 2004, McKinney conducted the research necessary to determine a brand strateg· and developed a logo and tagline. This project cost $63,000. They spent an additional $180,000 · promotional tools and marketing such as:

- a web portal that links brand-partner websites (economic development, airport, police, mai street, etc.)
- development of a video and brochure used to market the city on television, visitor sites an the internet
- enhancements to downtown to create a more charming atmosphere such as banners and o fashioned street lamps.

Fort Collins, CO undertook a branding process in 2007. The research, strategy and creative development cost about $76,000. Fort Collins is a medium sized mountain town near Denver tryi to distinguish itself among other towns that have very similar amenities to offer. Now that the brand strategy is complete, the Mayor and Council of Fort Collins have decided on an eight-year implementation strategy. They will take on projects each year as their budget allows. Currently, the community is working on a website that will act as a central access for visitors, residents and businesses.

Dayton, OH branding process took place in 2007. The main goal of the campaign was to keep

home-grown talent from moving away. Dayton paid $95,000 for the research, strategy and creative elements of the brand. Dayton also spent $50,000 to hire an advertising agency to develop:

- Dayton performance award for high performing Dayton businesses and residents
- A web portal for visitors, residents and businesses
- Print and web marketing campaign

Larger communities such as Las Vegas or Atlanta have spent upwards of $500,000 for brand development and implementation. The amount of research is much larger, and the marketing campaign is far more expensive for a community that relies heavily on tourism for revenue. Rece coverage of community branding in *The Wall Street Journal* that featured Providence, Rhode Islaı is included in Attachment B. A related piece from the Providence press is included in Attachment

A Branding Project for Rockville
The goal of our branding project is to present a distinctive and positive image of Rockville, and tc help Rockville compete to attract and retain visitors and shoppers, residents, and businesses. Thɛ brand should also assist with achieving a unified and consistent "look and feel" for the City's communication media that reinforces the community's distinctiveness. The City's Communication Manager will have the primary responsibility for overseeing the consultant's work to ensure the project is carried out on time, within budget, and according to scope. Throughout the branding process, the consultant will be expected to produce periodic reports to the Mayor and Council, keeping the governing body apprised of the progress of the project. The Request for Proposal (RFP), including the scope of work for this project, is included as Attachment E to this report.

While there are countless firms that specialize in public relations and marketing, there is a much smaller number of firms that specialize in community branding. For this project to be successful, is important to find a firm that has extensive experience in branding a community. The firm musl have the skills and experience in place to effectively involve the public in the branding process.

A branding process involves the four general phases described below. The City's RFP will invite interested bidders to describe their approach to carrying out the project to a successful conclusio The successful firm will propose an approach to this work that is thorough, effective, and realistic and demonstrate the firm's capacity to complete the project successfully.

Research We expect this phase will take several months and will consist of both qualitative and quantitative data gathering and research to determine the most salient characteristics that distinguish our community. This research will be the most important way of involving members o the community in the branding process. Included will be citizens, owners and employees of Rockville businesses, community leaders, public officials and community leaders, and visitors whɛ live outside of Rockville. Typical research activities in this phase include current situation analysiʂ internet surveys, phone surveys, person-on-the-street interviews, leader / stakeholder interviewʂ current communication audit, media audit, resident demographic, and shopping habits profiling. ' expect the consultant will also review Rockville's cultural and entertainment audit, and citizen surveys.

Strategy development This phase of the branding process is linked to the research phase. Throuç analyzing the research data, the consultant will identify strengths, challenges, and opportunities, and develop a "brand strategy" that identifies and promotes what's most distinctively attractive about Rockville. This is the time when the brand begins to come to life. An effective brand and strategy will be realistic and feasible, consistent with community values, and provide a genuine image of Rockville that best promotes our competitive advantages to a broad audience. The bran strategy must be relevant to Rockville's present and future situation, and differentiate the community from competitors. It will also need to be tested for relevance and effectiveness in ord

to achieve community acceptance.

Creative development The creative portion of the process is the most visible part of the branding process, and its success relies on the strength of the first two phases. In this phase the tangible items that support the brand strategy will be developed. These typically include a logo and tag lir and concepts for advertisements, websites, and marketing campaigns.

Implementation The consultant will provide a plan for implementing the strategy, and utilizing th creative elements. Actual implementation will be the most expensive part of the branding effort. Some communities choose to hire a local firm to assist with this part of the implementation process. Once a logo, tagline, and general strategy are developed, they should become apparent via a common message and design, at a minimum, through all City publications, advertising, the Website, television, signs, uniforms, the City fleet, City limits and wayfinding signs, and buildings Initial implementation could take place over a period of 12-18 months, or it could take several years, depending on how aggressive and well-funded an effort we choose to undertake.

Common Branding Errors to Avoid
Branding can be a very positive experience for a community, but if handled incorrectly, there are some risks associated with the process. Some possible, and common, errors to avoid are pointed out in Attachment D, and include the following:

- Design a tagline and logo without research - Without a clear understanding of our audience a tagline and logo could be meaningless, or worse, create controversy within the communit Although a logo and tagline would likely be a product of the branding process, Rockville would seek to bring our brand to life in many other ways that will resonate with the entire community.
- Create a brand without stakeholder input - Rockville has a long history of turning to our community members for their input. The research portion of the branding process would be inclusive of the entire community, stakeholders, opinion leaders, business owners, people who live or work in Rockville and Rockville's visitors. The research gathered from these people will create the basis for the entire brand outcome.
- Be unprepared for the reaction to the brand - Although the brand process will involve the community and the Mayor and Council throughout the process, there will always be citizens who are unhappy with the outcome. A community that involves stakeholders from the beginning and throughout can feel confident in their brand, and should consider carefully before changing or throwing out a carefully developed brand.
- Ignore our culture and heritage and focus only on "what we want to be" - Rockville is know for many things such as its Victorian homes, its shopping, Town Center, environmental leadership, and many other things. A successful brand will honor what Rockville is, and allo room to develop, but if it is built only on dreams for the future, it will likely come across as false advertising. A brand makes a promise, and if Rockville cannot deliver on that promise the brand will fail.
- Choose a brand by contest or committee - Branding will determine a strong singular messa that will leverage Rockville's strengths. It is critical to receive stakeholder input on the fron end of the branding process. However, to choose a brand, or its creative components throu a contest or by strict public comment will not assure us the best brand possible. The brand development must be done by using a reputable consultant.

Mayor and Council History
This is the first time this item has been brought before the Mayor and Council. The Mayor and Council's Vision identified a community branding campaign as a priority, and the project is includ in the FY 2010 Adopted Operating Budget.

Fiscal Impact
The FY2010 Adopted Budget includes funding of $75,000 for this project.

Once this project is completed, implementation of the branding strategy will require additional expenditures, some of which are not budgeted.

Next Steps
If the Mayor and Council direct staff to proceed with the research and strategy portions of the overall branding process, staff will finalize and release the attached Request for Proposal (RFP), with a response date of August 17, 2009. The Communication Manager will convene a panel to evaluate the submittals, and choose a consultant to recommend for the Mayor and Council's approval.
We expect to return with a recommendation to the Mayor and Council on September 21, 2009.

Attachments

Attach A - Public Management Branding Article.pdf

ATTACH B-In Hard Times - WSJ Article.pdf   ATTACH C - Providence Journal-Grigsby and Bramante.pdf

ATTACH D - Top 10 Branding Blunders.pdf   ATTACH E -Branding RFP June 15.pdf

Assistant City Manager:

Jenny Kimball, Assistant City Manager
Approved on: 12/19/2008

City Manager:

Scott Ullery, City Manager
Approved on: 06/09/2009